

Crisis Education Project Profile

March 2005

Project: Improving Basic Education (IBET) in Tajikistan

Locations: **Tajikistan** (Khatalon, Rasht Valley,
and Gorno-Badakshan)

Implementing Organization: Aga Khan Foundation, Tajikistan

Type of Programming: Enhancing the quality of primary school education

Target group/beneficiaries: Direct beneficiaries include primary school students in grades 1 through 4, with a special focus on teachers, school administrators and communities

Stage: Reconstruction/transition

Environmental Context of the Program

SOCIAL: The declaration of Tajik independence in 1991 was quickly followed by the explosion of ethnic tensions that had been suppressed throughout the years under Soviet rule. Ethnic cleansing led to the death of between 20,000 and 50,000 people, and resulted in 500,000 refugees and internally displaced people. The official state language is Tajik. Russian, widely used in government and business, and is a second language for most of urban non-Russian population. The Soviet social policy created a modern education system in Tajikistan. However, the quality and availability of education had not reached the Soviet Union-wide average, and is below the standards for Western industrial societies. The Tajik education system has suffered greatly since independence and particularly during civil war. Education is compulsory through secondary school, but completion rate is below 90 percent. Girls account only for 38% of the secondary school cohort, while in the lower grades they represented 51%. Facilities and materials are extremely inadequate, and specialized secondary and higher education programs poorly developed. While there is a growing government understanding of what education reform implies, the skills and financial resources to implement systematic reform need to be strengthened. Efforts must extend beyond support to the government in this process, and seek to involve the community in their children's education.

CULTURAL/RELIGION: Culture is influenced by the rich legacy of the supra-ethnic culture of Central Asia and other parts of the Islamic world from the eastern Mediterranean to India. Islam is practiced by about 90% (Sunni Muslim 80%, Shi'a (Ismaili) Muslim 5%); remainder Russian Orthodox, with some other small Christian and Jewish groups. The years following independence have witnessed the re-emergence of traditional attitudes with regard to gender roles in society.

ECONOMIC: While Soviet rule created an outward façade of modernization, Tajikistan had the lowest standard of living within the Soviet empire. The breakdown of Tajikistan's dependent economic relationship with the Soviet Union, coupled with the stress of economic restructuring and movement toward participation in the world market, was a source of intense hardship and exacerbated by civil war. Since the end of civil war in 1997 Tajikistan has experienced steady economic growth. Today, however, 60% of its people continue to live in abject poverty and its economic situation remains fragile.

Political Relationships: The Republic of Tajikistan gained its independence during the breakup of the U.S.S.R. on September 9, 1991 and promptly fell into a civil war from 1992-97 between old guard regionally based ruling elites and disenfranchised regions, democratic liberal reformists, and Islamists loosely organized in a United Tajik Opposition (UTO). The predominantly Kulyabi-led Tajik Government and the UTO successfully negotiated a power sharing peace accord in 1997 and implemented it by 2000.

Program Description

TARGET GROUP: Target groups include: teachers; teacher trainers, such as key teachers, District Education Department methodologists and Institute for Professional Development specialists; school managers and management level persons at the District Education Departments; and the community in the immediate vicinity of the school.

MATERIAL/PHYSICAL RESOURCES: Schools are provided with resources to support the restoration of services and educational reform across the primary education sector. Material rehabilitation of school infrastructure includes the provision of computers, and building reconstruction and rehabilitation. Schools are also provided with resources for community use, including books, library resources, and equipment for heating. Community involvement, contributions and ownership are a prerequisite for any type of physical project investment in a school. Three Learning Resource Centers, two Mobile Resource Training Centers, and mini resource centers, as well as published teaching materials, are being developed to promote educational innovation and the dissemination of information. Project investment has come in the form of books, instructional materials, and other objects useful when teaching students and training teachers. A critical part of the project revolves around development of appropriate supplementary classroom materials, and training government institutions to revise and refine the current curricula. The project works intensively with the Institute for Professional Development (IPD) in Khorog to develop the skills of curriculum specialists and has spent significant efforts getting the IPD in Khorog to do outreach work with other state-run IPDs.

FINANCIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES: USAID and other donors, including CIDA, NOVIB, and SDC, provide funding for the IBET program. AKF has also funded a portion of the program from its own donations. In addition, existing parent committees provide management of non-budget school funds and the Ministry of Education plays a major role in helping to plan and support quality improvements.

COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION: The program provides assistance in helping communities and school system administrators plan strategically, including setting goals and objectives, and identifying and allocating critical resources. It does this by involving parents and communities in the immediate vicinity of the schools in managing non-budget funds, improving education provision and making the school more community-centered. The program creates an environment in which schools become centers for their communities. In doing so, the program ensures that the work of the Parent Committees is uniform and operationally active in all districts and community participation goes beyond financial support to schools, and includes providing needed resources, such as wood for heat in the winter. In addition, it provides support for developing a sound committee structure, including transparency and accountability, in each school. There is reciprocity of support between the schools and communities, and Parent Committees are integrated into a network of local community-based organizations at the village level. This network manages locally available resources and meets the development needs of the community to ensure that there is a strong structure available for community mobilization at the village level. As schools are now serving as a new center for the community, they have become a place where all people can participate in discussing village issues.

TEACHER TRAINING CURRICULUM: The program relies heavily on ongoing in-service support for teachers through both mentoring and adopting a cluster approach. Training is provided for teacher trainers and teachers on methods centered on promoting active learning at the primary school level. The focus areas of training include: education management, curriculum development, establishing a “whole-school improvement model,” active teaching/learning methodologies and techniques, self-evaluation and assessment, and community mobilization. Systematic activities are prioritized to enrich the National Curriculum by developing appropriate, relevant and creative curriculum resources and materials, such as frameworks, guides and activity books that are designed and tested by the Curriculum Cluster field testers in core schools. Children are also included in assessment of teacher training, and are periodically asked to comment on how teachers’ classroom management and approaches change after they have participated in training. Training is also provided for community groups, local NGOs and parents in areas such as: management and micro financing, school development, and effective management of committee development and school funds. Workshops and trainings on building institutional capacity for restructuring and reform at the national, regional and community levels are given to District Education Departments, Regional Education Departments, Institutes for Professional Development and, where possible, Ministry of Education staff. In addition, district educational authorities are trained in institutional strengthening. An important strategy adopted by the project follows a cluster approach.

Programming Interventions: Impact and Effectiveness

ACCESS: The program has so far worked with more than 300 schools and 280 teachers. IBET has also trained an additional 60 Master trainers, many of which are working for the government to deliver educational support, leadership and mentoring at the school level. The overall projected effect for the program will be to improve the learning environment and test results of over 7,500 pupils.

QUALITY/OVERALL PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS: Through this program, AKF aims to help the government realize its EFA goals and strengthen its educational sector reform to encourage decentralization of decision-making and build capacity of education managers at all levels; and improve school infrastructure. Part of support to reform will initial the illustration of vital models for decentralization, private-public mix, teacher training and the core school and allied school concepts for the government to gain from these pilot to consider in the process of educational reform. Enrichment frameworks for the National Curriculum (to make it interdisciplinary, relevant, contextualized, flexible, activity-based involving Critical Thinking, Creative Writing and Integrated Topic Approach) have now been developed for all primary subjects and field-tested to some extent. This is expected to bring about a change in the understanding of the knowledge of the students and a change in the instructional methods of the teachers through workshops, and to assess students’ achievements through field-testing in the classrooms.

Curriculum workshops for all the core schools of IBET districts were successful in raising the awareness of teachers about appropriate use of the National Curriculum in the teaching process and to contextualize the curriculum issued by MoE taking into consideration the needs of the students, historical and cultural background of local population, the environment and the resources available. Challenges to the project revolve around human capacity and effectiveness. The program has encountered challenges around ensuring staffing at full capacity, particularly with its emphasis on qualified local staff. In addition, the project has invested a great deal of resources in giving teachers appropriate follow-up support in the classroom environment. The project has also not been immune to how changes within the Ministry of Education affect program implementation and coherent vision and cooperation with the government.

EQUIP1: Building Educational Quality through Classrooms, Schools, and

Communities is a multi-faceted program designed to raise the quality of classroom teaching and the level of student learning by effecting school-level changes. EQUIP1 serves all levels of education, from early childhood development for school readiness, to primary and secondary education, adult basic education, pre-vocational training, and the provision of life-skills. Activities range from teacher support in course content and instructional practices, to principal support for teacher performance, and community involvement for improving school management and infrastructure. EQUIP1 works with food for education issues and contributes to the provision of education and training in crisis and post-crisis environments.

The American Institutes for Research (AIR) is the lead organization responsible for implementing EQUIP1 and is joined by fourteen outstanding partners: Academy for Educational Development, Aga Khan Foundation USA, CARE, Discovery Channel Global Education Fund, Education Development Center, Howard University, International Reading Association, The Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation, Juárez & Associates, Inc., Michigan State University, Save the Children, Inc., Sesame Workshop, University of Pittsburgh, and World Education, Inc..

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